



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 8, 2008

The Best Hope for Sustainable Peace: Women

With a political deal now signed and poised for implementation, we have high hopes for peace in Kenya. But one vital piece is still missing that would do much to guarantee stability for that troubled country: Kenyan women must be part of the solution.

One of the untold stories of the crisis, which has threatened to tear the country apart, is that behind the scenes, away from the media spotlight, Kenyan women came together across political parties, religious differences and ethnic backgrounds to speak with one voice. They urged their leaders to reach a political solution and address the historic economic and social marginalization that has fueled the conflict following disputed presidential elections last December. Now they must be given the opportunity to use their collective strength and common agenda to put Kenya on a course for a better future.

As the plans for power sharing and reconstruction are developed, we urge full involvement of Kenyan women in the coalition government and reform agenda, and in gaining access to land and other support to rebuild devastated communities. More importantly, we support Kenyan women's pledge to be central to the healing that needs to occur for nation building to take place.

African women have played significant roles in resolving conflicts in countries such as Burundi, Liberia, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola and South Africa. They have the potential to contribute to solving other crises on the continent like the one in Zimbabwe. On this International Women's Day, we call on the global community to acknowledge the vital role which women leaders around the world play in helping to resolve conflict and foster peaceful and prosperous societies.

As members of The Elders, a group who came together last year under Nelson Mandela's inspiration and Archbishop Desmond Tutu's chairmanship to speak freely on global issues, we want to reaffirm the importance of promoting women's leadership, and highlight the ongoing urgent need to protect the human rights of women. We welcome the fact that today a growing number of women hold positions of political authority around the world. We celebrate the progress that has been made in countries like Liberia where Africa's first woman President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, is working tirelessly to bring security and development to her country.

But for countless millions of women and girls, there is little that we can celebrate. The situations they find themselves in are truly intolerable. Women make up most of the world's poor. Gender-based violence and systemic discrimination against women continue in many countries around the world. Women are particularly at risk in most conflict situations, and maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS rates for women are worsening. Adolescent girls are

especially vulnerable, and empowering them is key to tackling these challenges. Young girls are often overlooked in efforts to help poor communities despite the fact that they have tremendous impact on household survival and how societies function.

The results of a new poll on women's rights in 16 nations by WorldPublicOpinion.org released this week show an overwhelming majority of people around the world say that it is important for "women to have full equality of rights compared to men," with most believing it is very important. In countries from Iran to China to Indonesia, there is widespread support for government and UN action to prevent discrimination.

The recognition of women's rights as human rights is testimony to the success of decades of advocacy by women and their allies. Women's advocacy has brought about pioneering change in areas such as women's access to education and political participation, as well as in awareness-raising about issues of women's health and violence against women. It has also transformed interpretations of the human rights framework to take greater account of women's lives.

As part of our Every Human Has Rights Campaign to mark the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights during 2008, the Elders are working with a wide range of organizations and networks to remind the world of the unfinished work to promote women's leadership and protect the human rights of all women.

Co-written by members of The Elders: Kofi Annan, Jimmy Carter, Graça Machel, and Mary Robinson.

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